

# GOP says Nevada still a state to fight over

By Anjeanette Damon, Las Vegas Sun

Rest easy, Nevada. You're still a battleground state.

At least so say political operatives on both sides of the aisle.

Admittedly, they may have a bit of a vested interest in saying so. Presidential battleground status opens the spigot to tens of millions of advertising dollars.

By the last count compiled by the *Washington Post*, \$54 million was spent on Nevada airwaves to influence the presidential election here this year – that's about \$53 per vote cast here.

But some are questioning whether Tuesday's results support the claim that Nevada's six electoral votes are worth fighting over anymore.

President Obama last week won Nevada convincingly for the second time. In fact, his margins in 2008 and 2012 far exceeded former President George W. Bush's Nevada margins in 2000 and 2004.

Democrats have 90,000 more registered voters than Republicans. They have a well-financed party structure in place – an organization noticeably absent on the Republican side. And they have control of the state Legislature.

Some might say that doesn't sound like the metrics of a true swing state.

Indeed, it's starting to sound a lot like New Mexico – previously a battleground state before turning convincingly blue beginning about four years ago and disappearing from the

presidential campaign radar screen.

Is Nevada in danger of becoming the dreaded flyover state that the presidential contenders pass by in between campaign stops in Colorado and fundraising stops in California?

Republicans, with a tinge of apprehension in their voices, say: Not yet.

“This is the bluest purple state in the country,” said Mac Abrams, Sen. Dean Heller’s campaign manager. “But we’re still a purple state.”

Perhaps Heller’s victory is an indication of that. The Republican barely defeated Democrat Shelley Berkley, whose campaign was hamstrung from the beginning by a House ethics investigation.

But Republicans also point to the fact that Nevada’s most popular politician, Gov. Brian Sandoval, is a Republican. The party represents half of Nevada’s congressional delegation. And although the GOP narrowly lost an attempted takeover of the state Senate, the number of voters statewide backing a Republican candidate for the Legislature almost equaled the number of voters backing a Democratic candidate.

“Yes, we’re still a battleground state,” Republican strategist Robert Uithoven said. “However, we need to do significant work within the Republican Party to keep it a battleground state.”

And that’s where the argument becomes more than just how much battleground status increases the bottom lines for television station owners.

If Republican presidential contenders cede Nevada, they’re pretty much handing it over to the Democrats. And that’s not necessarily good for Republican candidates down ticket.

“At this point, it’s the Republicans’ responsibility to keep us a battleground state,” Uithoven reiterated.

Democrats aren't about to take Nevada for granted, either.

"Clearly it's more Democratic than it used to be," one Democratic operative said. "I think you can call it a Democratic-leaning state, but I personally feel less confident about calling it a solidly blue state.

"I don't think we're there yet. And Democrats have to be careful not to go down the same flawed path Nevada Republicans went down."

Just a decade ago, Republicans were the powerful party in Nevada. Democrats had no party structure to rely on, held only one statewide office and seemed unable to wrest control of the state Senate away from the Republicans.

The story is a cautionary indication that the political balance of power in Nevada can easily execute an about-face.

So will Nevada voters have the same level of television ads, robo-calls and door knocks to complain about again in four years?

"I think they will," the Democratic operative said. "If either side takes Nevada for granted, I think they do it at their own peril."